

Summary of Meeting Transportation Discussion

Civic Caucus, 8301 Creekside Circle, Bloomington, MN 55437
Thursday, May 29, 2008

Present: Verne Johnson, chair; Bill Frenzel (by phone), Paul Gilje, Jim Hetland (by phone), Jim Olson (by phone), and Clarence Shallbetter

A. Context of the meeting--After several solid weeks of receiving input on transportation issues, the Civic Caucus core group paused for discussion about where we are and should be going.

B. Next meeting--Paul and Verne said that our next meeting will be Friday, June 6, with David Broden and Marianne Curry, both of whom are regular participants and who will be sharing their detailed thoughts on the future of the Civic Caucus.

C. Approval of summary--The summary of our meeting with Conrad deFiebre was approved.

D. Status of implementation of Civic Caucus recommendations--As a follow-up to the 2008 Legislature, Verne and Paul summarized the status of implementation of several recommendations.

1. Instant Runoff Voting (IRV)--The Civic Caucus itself has not yet taken a position on IRV. The Caucus recommended that political polling organizations start asking respondents to rank candidates in order of preference. An IRV proposal is likely to be on the ballot in St. Paul this fall. No action was taken in the Legislature this year on a bill for uniform IRV procedures among charter cities. That bill is likely to be proposed again in 2009. IRV is scheduled for implementation in Minneapolis next year.

2. Judicial selection--Faced with considerable opposition from district judges, the Legislature didn't act on the Quie commission recommendations (supported by the Civic Caucus) for a merit-based appointment process to replace partisan elections of judges. Our report also noted that the Minnesota Supreme Court could consider some changes in its rules relating to the conduct of courts. It is expected that another effort to implement the Quie recommendations will occur in 2009.

3. Legislative redistricting--No action occurred in the 2008 Legislature on the Mondale-Carlson recommendations, supported by the Civic Caucus, for a bi-partisan panel of judges to draw redistricting plans. The proposal may be in front of the 2009 Legislature.

4. Environmental constitutional amendment--The Civic Caucus recommended that the Legislature try to enact a law, not a constitutional amendment, but the Legislature went ahead and placed the amendment on the ballot, without trying the legislative route. The Civic Caucus likely will be preparing its position paper on the amendment this summer.

5. The precinct caucus/endorsement/nominations process--The Civic Caucus is in the information stage on a larger look at elections-related issues. No major

action in this area occurred in 2008. Efforts to move the primary date forward were unsuccessful in the Legislature.

6. Changes in the media--The Civic Caucus has held several informational sessions on changes in the media, but has not moved to any recommendations.

D. Status of transportation issues--For the last couple of months the Civic Caucus has devoted most of its time looking at issues of governmental structure in the transportation area. As an introduction to its discussion today the Civic Caucus first reviewed major changes, including increasing the gasoline tax, giving metro counties the authority to levy a sales tax for transitways, and approving funds for the Central Corridor light rail line between the two downtowns. The group then listed what appear to be significant issues remaining on the table.

1. Extent to which new funding addresses unmet needs--While the magnitude of funding, some \$6.6 billion over 10 years, seems large, we have heard that unmet needs will still be very high. For example, the new law gives MnDOT about \$400 million more a year, but one source estimates its unmet needs on the order of \$2.4 billion a year. It appears as if unmet needs always will be with us, meaning, therefore, that the process of deciding which needs are of greatest importance will be key.

2. Complication on metro transportation structure--A new joint powers board of metro counties has been established to approve grants for proposals for new rail and bus transitways. New transitways are to be consistent with the policy plan of the Metropolitan Council, but it appears that the county organization will be more influential in determining which transit improvements are undertaken in which order.

3. Covering operating deficits--Legislation provides that the county-based sales tax may be used for operations as well as construction, which likely will cause pressures on the Metro Council, which will be responsible for finding funds to cover operating deficits. The county organization, however, might be more interested in building new transitways. The size of such deficits could grow, depending upon numbers of riders attracted to new transitways.

4. Making the Central Corridor LRT project work--Several questions remain, including whether enough money will be available, whether additional stations will be added, whether the route through the University of Minnesota can work to the benefit of all parties, and whether LRT and other vehicles can satisfactorily co-exist on University Avenue.

5. Whether state transportation planning structure is adequate--Beyond the question of why the I-35W bridge collapsed is a question of the adequacy of the decision-making process on transportation at the state level. For example, how do three key state participants--the Governor, the Legislature, and MnDOT--inter-relate?

6. Whether changes in the private sector role are desirable--Some states appear more open than is Minnesota to a larger role for the private sector in transportation.

7. Whether planning principles are taking a backseat to availability of money--The list of needs is so large for both highways and transit that some persons

wonder whether a systematic priority-setting process is possible. Instead, special funding sources--such as a newly-enacted county-based sales tax for transitways or earmarking specific projects in state or federal legislation--seem to be growing in importance.

8. Whether LRT and commuter rail should be primarily deliberate tools for economic development--Increasingly those individuals and groups that advocate on behalf of LRT and commuter rail seem to be highlighting the importance of using such improvements to guide economic development. If so, what of the role of city governments, traditionally the level that makes land use decisions? Would some higher level of government make the economic development choices? If rail is used to guide development, why would additional public funds, such as tax-increment financing, be needed?

What has happened along the Hiawatha LRT line? Has development occurred as anticipated, including along 5th Street in Minneapolis and through the Hiawatha corridor, as well as near the airport and the Mall of America?

9. Whether the objectives of promoting mobility and easing congestion are less important than those of guiding economic development--If guiding development becomes the main objective, how does easing congestion fit in the picture? Doesn't the existence of excessive congestion have an effect of guiding development to lesser-congested locations?

10. Whether a corridor-based transportation strategy accurately reflects travel patterns today and in the future--LRT and commuter rail are planned along traditional corridors from suburbs to central cities. Such improvements benefit from a concentration of jobs at one end of the corridor and an ability to be near large numbers of homes at the other end. However, job locations are spread across the metro area, with the vast majority located outside the downtowns. Are transportation planners giving adequate attention to helping people get from where they live to where they need to go?

E. Civic Caucus planning over the summer months--Verne said that we need to be looking at the future of the Civic Caucus during the summer months. We need to establish priorities for areas in which we'll be involved. We've developed a very effective process for sharing information and for receiving input from our participants. We have received suggestions for expanding our activities, but real financial constraints are present.